

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL**

**ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LOWELL, MA:
MAKING, REMAKING, AND REMAKING AGAIN**

INFORMANT: PHALA CHEA [CAMBODIA]

INTERVIEWER: CHRISTOPH STROBEL

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C = CHRISTOPH

P = PHALA

Tape 08.14

C: First if you could just please state your name, address, place of birth, and your background?

P: Sure. My name is Phala Chea. And I live on Lawrence Drive in Lowell. I came from Cambodia in 1981.

C: What were the decisions that motivated you to move to the United States? Was it family?

P: We had a very difficult situation in our country. The Khmer Rouge took over our country from 1975 to 1979, so because of that, we were forced to escape to save ourselves. So basically, my immediate family and I left Cambodia in 1979 and fled to refugee camps in Thailand.

C: And then through the process there, you were able to get to the United States?

P: Yes. It took us about a year and a half to leave the camps because we had to go through the refugee application process and find a sponsor. We were able to locate my mother cousin's in Oregon. It took us a year and a half to get to the U.S. with his sponsorship.

C: Was Lowell the first place you went to? Or was it just, like many Cambodians around here that went to different cities before they came to Lowell?

P: We went to Portland, Oregon first because that was where my mother's cousin lived.

C: And then what spurred you to move to Lowell?

P: After living in Oregon for about five years, we heard through friends about the large population of Cambodians living here in Lowell. And we wanted to find more comfort within our own community and to be closer to our relatives living in Montreal, Canada. So that's why we moved to Lowell.

C: So that is actually then a lot closer. So you arrived in the mid 80s, 1986? (P: In 1987.) In 1987, thank you. Hmm, what was your first impression when you first came to the United States? But also the first time when you came to Lowell? I mean did you have any preconceptions about the United States?

P: We really didn't have any. I mean my parents went to an ESL class in Indonesia for three months. And they learned about the culture of the United States, but then we really didn't, hmm, know exactly what to expect just from what we've heard from teachers and what we could see in books. Seeing the actual United States was rather different from our imagination. So we were quite shocked when we first arrived. The weather, the environment, the people and everything else around us were startlingly different from our imagination.

C: Did you live in a city in Cambodia, like Phnom Penh?

P: We lived in Phnom Penh and then the Khmer Rouge forced us to go to Battambang's countryside to work the fields, but we had very little experience in that area. We really didn't know much about planting and harvesting rice.

C: What was your first impression when you came to the city? Did you feel at home in the Cambodian community?

P: We felt more comfortable here, than living in Portland. We only knew a few families in Portland, so not enough for us to be comfortable, to be able to speak the language, and practice our culture and traditions. But coming here, we can go to temples, markets and different Cambodian agencies when needed.

C: Do you actually plan to spend the rest of your life in Lowell? Or... you may be thinking about moving to, to a different part of the country, or maybe to the suburbs, or?

P: It's hard to say. My family and I are getting used to Lowell. We are getting used to the snow and the different New England seasons. So hmm, I don't know. If we do decide to move, it'd be somewhere where we could continue to be together. We don't want to separate. Right now we are happy in Lowell. We have our work and our schools here.

C: You are currently a US citizen or, (P: Yes.) How long have you lived on... Lawrence Street, right? (P: Lawrence Drive.) Lawrence Drive, sorry.

P: This is my second year.

C: Ok, right. And Lawrence Drive, which general neighborhood does that fit into?

P: It's probably considered a downtown area home. It's one of the mills, (C: Ok! Yes!) near the Tsongas Arena.

C: Do you feel, like this is part of a neighborhood? Because part of what the Park is trying to figure out is how much in the past people... how their life focused around neighborhoods.... I live just off Cupples Square. And the Park believes this is sort of a stronghold of the Cambodian community. Do you feel that this is the case? Or is it like I live here but I go shopping in the Highlands and if I have to, I go up to Nashua? How much importance does neighborhood have?

P: Hmm, it doesn't really have any importance. I just want a place where I can be safe and comfortable. And I do my shopping all around town. Sometimes when I'm hungry for Cambodian food, I would go to the restaurants around the area or the supermarkets to find different food products.

C: Yeah, that makes sense. Are there any specific, hmm, businesses you go to for grocery shopping? Do you go exclusively to Cambodian stores? Or do you also go to places like Market Basket or Hannaford?

P: Yes, I shop everywhere for food. Sometimes when I'm busy, I would shop within close range of my house. In the area, I can go to Market Basket downtown or the Asian markets nearby.

C: Thank you. Hmm, have you traveled much outside of Lowell? Maybe up to Montreal to meet your family, or back to Oregon, or back to Cambodia?

P: Yes. I've traveled quite a bit to Montreal and to California and Texas where we have relatives. I haven't returned to Oregon yet. I hope to go there soon. I only returned once to Cambodia.

C: Where do most of your friends live in Lowell? Friends' family? Are they stretched out all over the city, or?

P: All over the city, yes.... My family lives in Belvidere, and I have a lot of friends in the Acre and a lot of friends in the Highlands as well.

C: Do you, and again I'm trying to push that neighborhood question, but if you, when you, when you, say in the Highlands, or in the Acre neighborhood, does that feel to you like a Cambodian neighborhood? Or do you feel, say more comfortable being in the Highlands than say in Belvidere? Or does it matter?

P: Well, if, if I want to be or do activities or be involved in the same culture, then I would probably be more comfortable going to the Highlands or the Acre area where there are more Cambodian families.

C: I would like to switch to family now. (P: Ok.) How does your family stay together? I mean you made the point that family is very important to you. And does most of your family at this point live in Lowell?

P: My parents and I live in Lowell. My brother and sister live in Boston.

C: Ok. Is that due to work? Economic circumstances?

P: To work. They also attended colleges in the Boston area. So from there, they've gotten jobs within the Boston area. That's why they decided to just stay in Boston.

C: Just to stay there? Do they come back to visit (P: Yes!) often? (P: Uh huh.) Do you still have family in Cambodia as well or?

P: Yes, yes, cousins, aunts and uncles.

C: Do you talk with folks in Cambodia a lot via e-mail or phone....

P: Yes, phones and e-mails.

C: Does family from Cambodia ever come to visit you to the US?

P: Hmm, only a few were able to get permission to come. Others couldn't. They tried to come, but they couldn't get a visa.

C: Ok. Is the admission process pretty strict?

P: Yes, they are very strict.

C: Is this from the Cambodian government side or the US government side?

P: Hmm, I think it's a little bit of both, but more on the US government side.

C: Do you feel like your life is different from that of your parents? Do you feel more privileged than your parents have been?

P: I think so. I mean they came here at a very tough age, middle age, and it was very hard for them to go to school because they had responsibility of taking care of their children and be able to provide financially for the family. They had to support their children in education. So they've sacrificed a lot. And for me, because I had their support, I was able to do more with my life.

C: Do you consider Lowell your home?

P: Yes.

C: Do you feel that, the Cambodian... the language, the cultural heritage, do you feel that this is still playing an important role in your life?

P: Very much so. I mean more so than when I was younger. Hmm when I was younger, the most important thing for me was to be able to fit in school and to fit in with my friends. I tried to

assimilate and tried to be like them as best as I could, even sacrificing my own language and my own culture sometimes. But now I realized that my culture and language and my Khmer identity are very important to me, and that I should try to maintain it, and also work with the community to try to preserve it for the young generation as well.

C: Did you go to school both in Oregon and in Lowell, or?

P: Yes.

C: Did you feel that because there was a stronger Cambodian community here, that it was a little bit easier, or did that even make it harder?

P: Hmm, well, I went to Oregon, hmm, in elementary school. I started fourth grade, then went on to middle school. We had very little. There were only, maybe two or three other students with the same background as myself. And I found that to be very difficult because I had really no one to communicate or relate with because they were in other classrooms. And I didn't know the language when I first arrived. It was very difficult for me to understand what was happening in the classroom, what was happening at school....over here, you may have a teacher or sometimes a paraprofessional, or other students who you may talk to in your language.

C: So here there was more of support network?

P: Yes, yes.

C: You still speak Khmer?

P: Yes.

C: Do you feel like, having those two languages is actually an asset or does that hold you back?

P: It's quite an asset for me in my line of work because I deal with a lot of families, many of whom are Cambodians. I work in a center where families come register their children for school and where they can learn about the school system. Or if they need help with anything, I'm able to communicate and assist them.

C: How, again maybe to draw comparison with your parents, how was language a different issue for them? Was it easy for them to learn English? Was that something that they always struggled with?

P: Hmm, more so for my mother than my father. Both of them came here knowing French, so they were somewhat able to relate and transfer some of that knowledge into English. My parents never had the opportunity to take in depth ESL courses here. They really didn't have time to focus on learning English. So for them, they basically learned English in their work settings. Even now, my mother is not as proficient in English as she hopes to be. She just knows enough to get by. But for my father, he was able to continue his education in the US and is proficient in English.

C: Does your mother, it sounds like she works as well? (P: Yes.) Do you feel that it held her back professionally to not have the language ability? And that language and knowing English opened up doors to you and your father, it opened up opportunities that she couldn't get?

P: Yes, I believe so. My mother's priority was to make sure that we succeed in school. She did not have the time to go to school to improve her English. This held her back

C: Was it easier for her once you guys moved to Lowell because there was more of network, more shops?

P: Yes, yes. It was easier for her because she was able to speak Khmer with friends and community members.

C: Let's maybe now switch to economics. Do you still support, either you or your family, do you support relatives back in your homeland, which is quite frequent with immigrant community?

P: Yes, yes, we do.

C: Hmm, is it just immediate family members or extended (--)

P: Extended.

C: Just extended family, or do you, do you make donations to schools and churches?

P: We do that as well; we donate. My parents actually are in Cambodia right now. Hmm, and for my mother it's her first time back; for my father, I think this is his third or fourth time back. They are basically there to unite with their family members and to also help some of the villagers dig wells. Before they went, they were able to fund-raise some money for their well digging project.

C: Do you like the job that you are doing right now? Do you feel like that you are making a difference? Sounds like you are the perfect person for the job.

P: I do. I like this job very much because I get to work with everyone living in Lowell. And then I get to work with different community members; I get to see newcomers come to Lowell.

C: What groups do you have? Obviously a lot of Southeast Asians, but other new immigrants...?

P: We are beginning to see members from countries in Africa and Brazil. And we are still seeing, a few here and there from Vietnam and Cambodia.

C: And also a few Indians coming to (--)

P: A few.

C: If you could have any job that you wanted, what would that be?

P: If I can have any job, it would be something similar to this one, where I can get to work with the community. Something in a social service field where I can help people maneuver and improve their livelihood.

C: Yeah, makes sense. Let's maybe switch to social networks and religion. Hmm, do you or your family attend religious services? Do you go to temple?

P: We do. Not as often as we would like to because of our work schedule. But we try to attend special ceremonies.

C: Theravada Buddhism?

P: Uh huh.

C: Which temple do you go to if you don't mind if I ask?

P: Well there are three temples – one in Lowell here and then two -- Upstairs Downstairs in Chelmsford; we attend all three.

C: So there's not a specific one. Is that a usual thing?

P: It's usual, I mean, for us. We find that we get along with all three. And a lot of our friends go to all three, so we go there with them. So it doesn't really matter. I think for some people maybe they like one better than the other, but for me, I have no preference.

C: Is it, I mean, if you were sort of raised in that Jewish, or Christian tradition even Islam, you have sort of one-day of worship? Is that? That's certainly not the case with Buddhism, but do you feel like that a lot of the worship activities now push to the weekends just because to sort of accommodate people's working lives?

P: Yes, yes, more so. I mean, Buddhism is everyday practice. It's part of our life. But for special occasions, special ceremonies, they are held back to the weekends to accommodate workers and students.

C: Is it looking like the Upstairs Downstairs Temple that their issues are going to get resolved?

P: Hmm, I thought they were moving to resolving things. I think they are getting a little bit friendlier. I've always felt comfortable going to either one. I don't know how far they've gotten with the resolution.

C: Is there a contact between, and you might not know about this, but the temples here and temples back in Cambodia? Is there interaction, exchanges, support networks...?

P: Right, I know there are some. I'm not sure to what extent exactly.

C: That's very interesting. Let's maybe switch over to social networks, friendship art, leisure and such things. Hmm, what do you do for fun when you, when you are not going to the temple, not spending time working, or spending time with family – that might be fun actually – but what other things do you do for fun? (P: What do I do for fun?) Do you go to vacation, or?

P: We do go on vacations. When we do, we mainly go up to Canada to spend time with our relatives or go to other states to visit our other relatives. Those are vacations. But if we want to do something locally, we'd probably go to visit our friends' homes around town or join them on special occasions, at one of the local restaurants.

C: Excellent. Hmm, do you have, relatives, well we've had this already. Yeah, you said you have relatives from Cambodia come to visit. When they get permission to travel, if they get permission to travel, how long do they usually stay and when they are here, what do you do with them?

P: What do I do, well, one time we had relatives staying over here about six months. We showed them around Lowell and around the States and took them up to New York and to California. So we tried to show them as much as possible because they usually don't get another chance to come here.

C: Wow, wow. Hmm, when they came to Lowell, did you also take them, and again this is the Park's agenda here, hmm, I'm gonna add it up. [C laughs] Hmm, did you take them to some of the Park museums as well?

P: We did. The National Park, the different mills and museums we have around here. We also took them to the boarding house to enjoy some of the music series we had. They even went to the folk festivals. (C: Oh excellent! So they were here for the folk festival!) Yes.

C: That's great.... Do you have mostly Cambodian friends or do you have a wider network of social activity?

P: I would say wider because I work in both groups, the mainstream as well as the Cambodians.

C: Yes, yes. Do you find that it's typical for most Cambodians of, hmm, or does it matter on if it's first generation, second generation? In other words, is that the same, does the same hold true for your parents, or maybe for your father but not your mother so that language is an issue there?

P: Language is an issue. It's a major issue in determining which group you feel comfortable with. If you feel comfortable with staying within your own community, then you do so. But for me, I try to make an effort to fit in the mainstream world so I can be more successful in my work.

C: What are you favored types of parties? Celebrations? Buddhist religious festivals? Or do you celebrate Christmas?

P: I celebrate everything

C: Everything. I like that attitude.

P: Everything because celebration is celebration, you don't need to practice specifically your own religion or tradition, you do things that make you happy. Celebrate Christmas? Sure, that makes my family happy. And we celebrate Thanksgiving in Lowell as well because we value the opportunity to spend time with our family.

C: Excellent. So there's mix of culture (P: Uh huh.) that is definitely (P: Right). What are some of the Buddhist, hmm, sort of your favorite Buddhist holidays? Do you like the New Year Celebration?

P: The New Year we have, hmm, not much of a celebration but we have a big gathering. We have also have a big religious holiday in early fall where we honor and remember the lives of our loved ones who have died. So that's the time where we revered and memorialized the past and pray for peace and serenity. And that's a special time for us.

C: Is there any activity at the temple or do you also celebrate that at home, or (--)

P: We do it at home and at the temple.

C: What are some of the radio stations or TV shows that you like, if any at all?

P: Hmm, so I don't really have time to watch TV these days. I don't know. I don't know what's on right now, but I do listen to the radio once in a while to catch up on pop music and pop culture.

C: Are you, a member of a neighborhood or a Cambodian cultural organization or anything of that sort?

P: I'm actually the president of the Cambodian Mutual Association and also a member of the Southeast Asian Water Festival.

C: Ok, excellent. Hmm, what are some of your tasks that have come with being the president of the Cambodian Mutual Association? What challenges do you face?

P: Networking is a big task for me, hmm, and making connections with members of the community. As a president, I want CMAA to be recognized by the mainstream community and I want to find ways to get more funding for the organization. These are my goals as well as my challenges. Each year, I feel that we have to scramble for city, state, and federal funding to keep our programs running. We try to do what we can yearly to make our organization known to the public. We try to reach out to the community and improve our relationships.

C: Do you find that the mainstream community is receptive the work that CMA is doing or what the Water Festival is doing? Or is it up and down or do you feel like maybe now it's more supportive that what it used to be?

P: I think we are getting more involvement from the city. I think they are starting to be more supportive of us, more so than in the past. The City Manager met with us several times to listen to our concerns and our issues. We are beginning to work closely with the Police Department as well. The Chief of Police is very nice. He is very open and very supportive of CMAA and is appreciative of our collaborative efforts. CMAA and other Southeast Asian organizations do not want to work in isolation – we want to work with the city to help improve our community.

C: Is this part of the efforts of community policing?

P: Yes.

C: Hmm, is that generally well received in the Cambodian community or... what's the general perception sort of like the general relationship between.... Well in other words, let's maybe shift a little bit to politics, and maybe let me ask you a more direct question....Who do you think has the political power in Lowell? And do you feel like the Cambodian community given its size and population, is it adequately represented politically?

P: We are definitely not represented in the political sphere adequately. So we have to work hard to build ourselves in the community and learn to be leaders.

C: Do you feel like the mainstream candidates are open to reach out to the Cambodian community?

P: Hmm, I wouldn't say one-hundred percent, but they are trying, some members are trying to reach out to us and we are doing what we can to make ourselves be heard. Sometimes it's very difficult because we have such a small quiet voice in the community.

C: So your job as the president is political lobbying?

P: To lobby, to be more of a liaison and advocate for the Asian community.

C: Do you find it's sometimes frustrating that there's no adequate political representation?

P: It is very frustrating because we do want someone in office to reflect the population, but we just can't get a candidate from the Asian community elected since former City Councilor Rithy Uong. We just don't have enough registered voters. We definitely need to promote voter registration more within our community. We also need to encourage potential candidates to put their name on the ballot. I'm not just speaking for the Cambodians, I'm speaking for other minority groups as well.

C: So is this in part.... It sounds like you are saying you have the candidate, but you worried about the vote.

P: In the past we've had, hmm, different people running for the School Committee and City Council, but we were unable to get enough votes to get them elected..

C: Is that due to the fact to the ward system? Is that part of the problem? Or is it part of the problem also that, a lot of, hmm, people in the Cambodian community, which is typical for a lot of new immigrants that they don't like to vote? Is it sort of a double-edged sword in that sense?

P: It is double-edged. Hmm, I mean we have a lot of people who are not US citizens and we have some US citizens who are not registered to vote. We also have some who are registered to vote but do not vote. I wonder if having translations available or diverse precinct/ward volunteers would help increase the number of voters.

C: How do you address that issue, or can you address that issue? I'm just trying to like...

P: We are trying. We offer citizenship classes through CMAA. Other community agencies also try to encourage people to register to vote. We need to continue to encourage civic engagement in our community.

C: Yeah, yeah, no, I can see how that is, hmm. Does that sometimes frustrate you or do you think that it's going regulate itself... you think it's going to work itself out?

P: How can we use our population to, hmm, get some political strength in the community? We have the numbers...all we need to do is to learn how to use them successfully. I'm hoping that in the future we'll be able to empower more folks to be more involved.

C: Other than Cambodians, would you like to see other groups represented in the city?

P: Yes, any minority group. I'm willing to support a strong candidate...someone who can be a positive role model for our young generation and who can inspire others to get involved.

C: Are there any efforts between the different groups, like say the African Cultural Association and the Cambodian Cultural Association?

P: There was some discussion earlier about joining and taking part and making connections with other minority groups in Lowell. We see this as a way to build strength and to motivate each other. And hopefully, maybe soon, we can make that happen. We can collaborate and be partners, so that together, our voice can be heard.

C: Did you go to high school here in Lowell?

P: I actually didn't go to the high school here; I went to the vocational school in Tyngsboro.

C: What are your overall impressions about the education opportunities in Lowell?

P: Hmm, I think we have a great opportunity to do very well in Lowell. I mean this is a city start pre-school and be able to graduate with a doctorate degree without having to leave Lowell. So this is an asset for us. As long as students stay focus and put in their best effort, they can be successful.

C: Have you done some of your university education in town or did you...?

P: Yes, I went to UMass Lowell.

C: Did you feel that when you were going to school either here or in Tyngsboro... that you had the ability to participate in bilingual program, whether Khmer classes offered, these things? I think it's changed now.

P: It has changed. Hmm, I did not get to participate in a bilingual program because when I came to Lowell, I was already a sophomore in high school.

C: But at least did they offer Khmer classes?

P: No, there weren't any Khmer classes.

C: Has that changed now?

P: That has changed for Lowell. At Lowell High School there are Khmer language classes available for students.

C: Do you feel that there's an effort within the school system to respect the cultural identities of Cambodians and other immigrant groups?

P: I think we are doing a lot more to learn about the cultures that are in front of us in the classroom. And I think we are trying to be more sensitive to the needs of our diverse students. Teachers are taking courses and are participating in trainings in order to improve their instructional strategies and to improve their understanding of the students' backgrounds.

C: Do you feel that was the same when you were a student in the system?

P: No, I don't think so. I mean, like I said earlier, I didn't experience elementary and middle school education here. What they had in the past was a bilingual education program, where students receive instruction in both their native language and English. Now it's different. We no longer have bilingual education. We have English Language Education Program where students receive sheltered English language support, in most cases, in the mainstream classrooms.

C: And that's because of the state policies and the school system has to comply?

P: Right.

C: Hmm, do you feel, and this is going back again to the Lowell National Park, sorry. Hmm, you obviously have been to some of the exhibits and you've done some of the museums. (P: Yes.) Hmm, do you feel that there's an adequate presentation of Cambodians and Southeast Asians in general, in the museums? Or would you like to see more on that?

P: Hmm, I don't think so. I mean there were some displays at the Morgan Cultural Center, but not enough to represent the need of the community. I think it would be great if the National Park in the future could get more Southeast Asians involved and showcase more exhibits to highlight art, history and culture of Southeast Asians.

C: Yeah, hopefully the study will help... knock on wood. [C laughs] How do you feel about the Park conducting tourism in the neighborhood, this walking tour fully through the Acre and so on? Have you ever thought about this? Or this hasn't crossed your mind? Or?

P: We had some thought of it. We think it would be a great idea to showcase Lowell's diversity. The only way for people to see the full diversity of Lowell is to tour different sections of Lowell and be able to taste different foods or be able to shop in different stores.

C: Have you experienced any sort of racism discrimination in the past or present here in Lowell? How does it feel being a Cambodian-American in the city?

P: Sometimes. I try not to take notice because if I notice this, it makes me feel sad and uncomfortable. So I try to ignore it and pretend that everything is good, and everything is safe. But I know there are racism and discrimination out there in Lowell. The only thing I can do in this situation is to be calm about it and try to be friendly with people. I know that to change the course of racism and discrimination, we need to educate our community about the different cultures. I think that would help eliminate or decrease racism. I also think that when a person has a negative attitude about a group or an individual, it's mostly based on misconceptions and misunderstandings. If people have a chance to learn about the history and cultures of others, they may develop sensitivity, compassion and tolerance for them.

C: Yeah. How do you think Lowell has changed since you first came here in the mid 1980s?

P: Hmm, Lowell has changed a great deal especially in the downtown and Acre area. Before, our family used to live in the Acre. My parents opened up their grocery business in the Acre in 1987. My memory of the Acre back then was of violence and fear. We had many gang and drug dealing activities in the area. The city cleaned up the area a great deal...taking down old and abandoned buildings and developing new ones.

C: Do your parents still run the grocery?

P: No, they sold it in the mid 1990s.

C: So they are retired now, or?

P: Yes, they've just recently retired.

C: Ok, good good. How is that working out for them? Do they like it, or?

P: I'm not sure. My mother is still thinking about pursuing another business when she comes back from Cambodia.

C: Ok. What dreams do you have for your future, for yourself, for the city, for Cambodia, for United States?

P: Right, for the whole world [Laughs]. (C: Yes, world peace.) Well, for Lowell, for our community, I hope that in the future we'll be able to have more multicultural activities, collaborations, and partnerships. I think in order for us to live together more peacefully, we need to have all of that; we need the opportunity to get to know each other so that we can grow together. And for Cambodia, I dream for peace, stability and democracy.

C: If you were there to ask questions about the experience of immigrants in Lowell, what would it be? Or in other words, what is the question I should have asked you but I didn't ask you?

P: Hmm, I think questions about adaptation and background experience. Lowell is known historically as a city of immigrants. In order to help immigrants and refugees transition smoothly and successfully in our society, we need to understand the adaptation process and the different background experiences that newcomers bring with them to Lowell. Through my own experience as a newcomer, I learned that when a newcomer arrives with strong educational background and strong skills that are transferable in his/her new setting, he/she is able to adapt quicker. As we are learning, this is not the case for many newcomers. Most of them arrived here with trauma, with fear, uncertainty and limited skills making adjustments and adaptation an every day struggle. As a community, we need to work together and help encourage each other to become successful citizens.

C: So how do you think that your background helped you? [C laughs] Just sort of developing your question now....

P: How did my background help me? Hmm, I came here at a very young age so I was able to go to school, learn English and learn a set of skills that are very different from my parents'. So I was glad of that opportunity. I think being able to survive the ordeal of the Khmer Rouge has made me a more resilient, more sensitive and more compassionate person. I feel that I can try many new things and be able to survive them all because nothing can compare to the Khmer Rouge experience.

C: Yeah. How do you think might your parents' background, because maybe they were urban (P: Uh huh.) 'cause they already knew a little bit French, just sort of recapturing some of the things you mentioned, how might that have shaped their experience? I know it's hard to talk for your parents (P: Right.), but if you.

P: Hmm, my father, before the Khmer Rouge era was a teacher. And my mother was a business woman. So when they came here, they couldn't use their skills and degree. My father didn't have enough English to teach when he arrived here, so he had to start all over again doing whatever jobs he could find at that time. And for my mother, we didn't have the money to open up a business when we first arrived here, so she also had to start from the beginning doing odd jobs. I believe my parents made three dollar and twenty-five cents per hour when they started working in 1981. My mother sewed fur coats and my father worked as a nurse's assistant in a nursing

home. My parents worked hard and managed their incomes wisely and were able to save enough money to buy a car a year later. Once they learned enough English and were able to find their way around town, they were able to acquire better jobs. From there, we continue to work hard as a family and saved enough to realize some of our American dreams.

C: So this level of persistence and survival. Do you feel like that the Khmer Rouge genocide that that is sort of the corner stone in your family's life?

P: Yes. We always have that experience to push us towards survival and success in this country. Our family feels fortunate to have survived the Khmer Rouge genocide and be able to enjoy peace in our new country.

C: It's interesting too because we've, I've been talking to an Armenian woman, and there's a genocide that occurs in Armenia in 1915. And even though she wasn't born at that time of the genocide, there was still such, her parents had undergone this experience and it was still such a shaping experience for her. Thank you for your time (P: You are very welcome.) and sharing your family's and your personal stories with us. We very much appreciate it. Thank you.

P: You are very welcome and good luck with your work.

C: Thank you.